

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-105994](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs that receive federal financial assistance, including college athletics programs. OCR is responsible for enforcing Title IX by investigating complaints, negotiating agreements with colleges to address concerns, and monitoring agreements.

GAO was asked to review opportunities for women college athletes. This report examines (1) college athletic opportunities for women and (2) the extent to which Education oversees compliance with Title IX college athletics requirements.

GAO analyzed the most recent available Education data reported by colleges for academic year 2021–2022 and analyzed OCR case management data for academic years 2008–2009 through 2021–2022, the most recent data available. GAO reviewed documentation for a nongeneralizable sample of 26 of 79 publicly available OCR athletics cases, selected to include a variety of athletics issues. GAO also interviewed Education officials and college athletic stakeholder groups, and reviewed federal laws and regulations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to Education to (1) expand its use of athletics data for oversight, (2) establish timeliness goals for responding to college monitoring reports, and (3) require OCR staff to record due dates for Title IX monitoring activities. Education agreed with the first and third recommendations. It did not agree or disagree with the second, but GAO continues to believe the recommendation is warranted.

View [GAO-24-105994](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or emreyarrasm@gao.gov.

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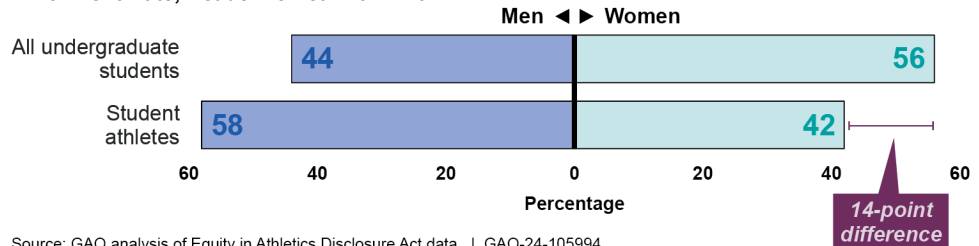
COLLEGE ATHLETICS

Education Should Improve Its Title IX Enforcement Efforts

What GAO Found

GAO found that more women enroll in college than men, but more men participate in varsity college athletics. The overall athletic participation rate for women was 14 percentage points lower than their enrollment rate in academic year 2021–2022. At about two-thirds of colleges (63 percent), the rate of women’s athletic participation was at least 10 percentage-points lower than their enrollment rate. Further, 40 percent of colleges not only had a large difference between women’s athletic participation and enrollment rates, but also offered the same number or fewer varsity sports for women in academic year 2021–2022 compared to 2009–2010.

Women Participated in Varsity College Athletics at a Lower Rate Compared to Their Enrollment Rate, Academic Year 2021–2022



Source: GAO analysis of Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act data. | GAO-24-105994

Note: For purposes of collecting athletics data, the Department of Education instructs colleges to report transgender participants consistent with their gender identity.

GAO found that Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) oversees compliance with Title IX athletics requirements primarily by investigating complaints and it conducts few proactive activities. Specifically:

- OCR uses Education athletics data on scholarships and participation to help select colleges for the small number of athletics reviews it initiates, but does not use the data to inform other oversight activities. Analyzing data regularly and expanding its use of data could help OCR do more proactive oversight.
- After obtaining formal agreements from colleges to address potential Title IX compliance issues, OCR did not always communicate with colleges and respond to their monitoring reports in a timely way. In some cases GAO reviewed, OCR took more than a year to review and approve a college’s plans to address potential compliance issues. In 10 of 26 cases GAO reviewed, OCR did not communicate with the college for a year or more. In five other cases, there was no communication for 5 or more years. Such delays can prevent colleges from addressing compliance concerns. Establishing agency timeliness goals for monitoring activities could help OCR respond to colleges in a more timely way and help ensure that colleges promptly address potential compliance issues.
- OCR does not require staff to record due dates for responding to colleges they monitor, and staff do not always enter this information in OCR’s management system. This limits OCR’s ability to track its responses and ensure that colleges address potential compliance issues in a timely way.